

## Report Finds Kansas' Kids Still Leaves Many Riding at Risk

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Kansas SAFE KIDS Coalition

In a report released in observance of Child Passenger Safety Week, Feb. 8-14, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign announced that Kansas is among the half of the states in the country whose child occupant protection law leaves many children unprotected while riding in motor vehicles. In the report *Closing the Gaps Across the Map: A Progress Report on SAFE KIDS' Efforts to Improve Child Occupant Protection Laws*, the National SAFE KIDS Campaign reviews improvements in laws since 2001 and summarizes gaps that have yet to be bridged.

"We know improvements to the Kansas Child Passenger Safety Law need to be made, especially to protect older children," said Jan Stegelman, Coordinator of Kansas SAFE KIDS.

"We are committed to working with our state legislators and our governor until we have a stronger law that parents and caregivers can look to for guidance in the safest way to restrain children in motor vehicles."



In its 2001 report, *A National Rating of Child Occupant Protection Laws*, SAFE KIDS stringently measured child occupant protection laws in all 50 states and the District of Columbia against a model law that requires correct restraint of all children, in all seating positions, in the care of all drivers. In the report, Kansas received a failing grade in part because children age 4-8 who should be in a booster seat are allowed under Kansas law to be buckled in an adult safety belt alone. Other gaps include inadequate penalties and failure to cover children over the age of 13.

Since then, Kansas SAFE KIDS and its many partners have been working to upgrade the Kansas law. Senate Bill 329 currently being considered by the Kansas legislature would close many of the gaps in Kansas' current law by:

- Requiring appropriate child restraints for children until they are age 8 or 4'9" or 80 lbs
- Requiring children ages 8 -18 to wear seat belts at all times
- Increasing the fine
- Including a one-year phase-in period for new requirements to allow for appropriate public education.

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Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for Kansas children ages 1 through 17. Observational surveys conducted in 2002-2003 found that while 79 percent of Kansas children ages 0-4 were in child seats, only 45 percent of children ages 5-9 and 44 percent of children ages 10-14 were protected by a booster seat or seat belt. Sadly, 72 percent of Kansas children ages 0-14 killed in motor vehicle crashes in 2002 were not using safety belts or child safety seats.

For information on child safety seats or loaner programs, call the Kansas SAFE KIDS hotline at 1-800-332-6262. The entire SAFE KIDS report, *Closing the Gaps Across the Map: A Progress Report on SAFE KIDS' Effort to Improve Child Occupant Protection Laws*, along with booster seat crash test footage, can also be accessed at [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org).